

SCRIPTURE and REASON

THAT THE

73.42  
Life of Man

Is not Limited by any Absolute

DECREE

OF

GOD.

*By the Author of the*

DUTY of MAN, &c.

LONDON

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# THE PREFACE.

Reader,

**T**HE following Discourse is of so small bulk, that a Preface may seem as needless and ridiculous as an Index. In some few hours it may be perus'd, and then both the design of the Author, and of the Book may be known. It may be thou desirest to know what was the occasion of the following Discourse. But I know not if I be obliged to answer this and such like idle questions; yet to satisfy thy curiosity, know, that the Author was unhappily engaged to converse with a Society of men, who frequently debated this and such like queries; and mostly he was opposed by the greater part, as maintaining an unreasonable position. Whether their charge be true or false, is a thing better determined by others unconcerned, than either by them or me. I know

## The Preface.

know very well their clamorous calumnies and reproaches, which since I cannot fly, I shall endeavor to slight, as indeed unworthy to be regarded.

If men of good consideration dislike any thing in the Discourse, I promise them, upon Information, I shall either endeavor to satisfy them, or to rest satisfied with what they say. Nay further, if there be any Line in it inconsistent with Piety and Religion, freely reject it; for I perswade thee (if the Author knew any such) he would burn the Book for its sake.

But I hope upon trial there shall be found no harsh notion in it to offend the most squeamish conscience. For the opinion I have rejected is, in my judgment inconsistent with the Divine Goodness and Holiness, repugnant to the freedom of Humane Nature, and destructive of all lawful means for the preservation of a mans life. While as that sentiment I embrace, begets in mens minds, noble and generous conceptions to promote real Piety and Religion, and intemperance; upon the account that Piety is the meanes to prolong our lives, and wickedness the cause of our short lives. And that this is no cheat or delusion, the wisest of men hath left upon record, PRO. II.



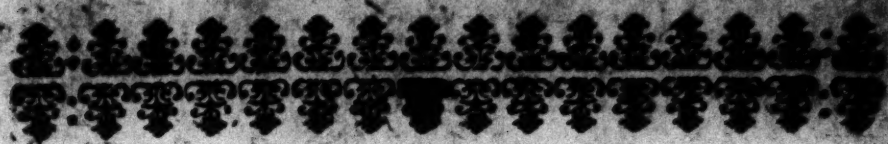
## The Preface.

19. As righteousness tendeth to Life, so he that pursueth evil, pursueth it to his own death. *This brings to my memory the Psalmists advice, with which I shall conclude;* What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy Tongue from evil, and thy Lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good. Seek peace, and pursue it. But the wicked and deceitful man shall not live out half his days,

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OF





OF THE  
**PERIOD**  
 OF  
 Humane Life

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JOB 14. 5, 6.

*Seeing his days are determined, the  
 number of his months are with  
 thee, thou hast appointed his  
 bounds that he cannot pass.*

*Turn from him that he may rest, till  
 he shall accomplish, as an hireling,  
 his day.*

**T**His excellent Book of *Job*  
 represents to us a plain and  
 unquestionable instance of the  
 various successes all Humane acti-  
 ons are liable to, and of the pro-  
 miscuous administration of Di-  
 vine Providence to particular per-  
 sons.

## Of the Period

sons. Here we may read of Job's happy and flourishing condition, that *he was the greatest of all the men of the East*; and of his low and afflicted state, poor even to a Proverb, and in a condition that only pleaded pity and compassion; and how again *the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning*.

From this various administration of Providence, men have taken occasion to make divers inferences. The scoffing Atheist hath from thence wickedly concluded, that God hath no care of Humane Affairs. If God (say these scoffers) had any care of this World, he would never suffer those men who have corrupted their ways by Treachery and Deceit, to prosper and enjoy an affluence of all worldly delights; whereas the virtuous and godly man, who takes heed to his ways, let he sin, and who throughout the whole course



*of Humane Life*

course of his life hath carefully studied to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and Man, is notwithstanding a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief; as plagued all the day long, and chastened every Morning, and hath Waters of a full Cup wrung out to him. If God (say they) concerned himself with Humane Affairs, he would never suffer the *Tabernacles of Robbers to prosper*, and the House of the Upright to be ruined and destroyed.

This is without all contradiction a great stumbling block and offence to the Blind Atheist; and hath even been a sad trial to the best of Gods people. *Wherefore does the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very Treacherously?* Was a question *Jeremy* could hardly at first resolve. And we find *Job* and the Prophet *Habakkuk* very much puzzled with it; and the *Psalmist*



psalmist plainly confesseth, that his feet were almost gone, and that his steps had well nigh slipt, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, Psal. 73.

To see bad men prospering in their wicked purposes and undertakings, and good men unsuccessful and frustrated in their just attempts, has been none of the least Topicks the *Epicurean* Atheists have made use of, in their exempting this World from the Divine Rule and Dominion. It was this single consideration that made *Cato* (who was once a Preacher of Providence; how Orthodox, I enquire not) accuse the Dominion and Government of the gods, of instability and unjustness, that *Cæsar* who tyrannically invaded the Rights of the Commonwealth of *Rome*, should be successful in so unjust attempts; and *Pompey* put to the worst, and overthrown in the lawful defence of his Country :

try: this stumbled him exceedingly. 'Tis true, some few of the Learned and Sober Heathens did not thus rashly fall foul upon Providence; but very wisely inferred the being of a future State, where the vertuous shall be rewarded, and the vitious punished. And those Holy men in Scripture, who did *fret because of the prosperity of the wicked*, quickly perceived their folly and error, and that the wicked were only fed like Sheep for the Slaughter; and as the Poet excellently expresseth it, *tolluntur in altum ut lapsu graviore ruant.*

*Job's* Friends, though they did not directly fall foul upon the Divine Providence, yet it is evident they were of opinion, that God would never have afflicted *Job* with such sad calamities, if he had been upright and sincere. Remember (saith *Eliphaz*) *who ever perished being innocent? Or where*



where were the Righteous cut off?  
 ch. 4. 7. Bildad tells Job, If thou  
 wert pure and upright, surely now  
 he would awake for thee; ch. 8. 6.  
 To both these Zophar succeeds  
 with a charge as grievous and bit-  
 ter, For thou hast said my Doctrine  
 is pure, and I am clean in thine  
 eyes: But O that God would speak,  
 and open his lips against thee, ch. 11.  
 v. 4, 5.

These were the Cordials Job's  
 Friends afforded him, while as his  
 afflicted condition pleaded pity  
 from his Friends. These accusa-  
 tions were heavy; but he saw it  
 was needless to tell them, that God  
 might destroy the perfect as well  
 as the wicked; and although he  
 would not plead not guilty, for  
 then he confesseth his own lips  
 should prove him perverse; yet he  
 humbly conceived, that it was a  
 dangerous principle to conclude  
 love or hatred from any such out-  
 ward dispensation

There



Therefore finding all his intreaties rejected, and his plea's for his own defence slighted; he is at length forced to beg their silence, desiring far rather to plead his cause with his Maker, who could discern his sincerity; and therefore having ordered his cause, *ch. 13. 18.* and taken an exact and accurate examination of his former ways, he begins his pleadings for a mitigation of his present calamity, from *v. 23.* which he continues till interrupted by *Eliphas, ch. 15.* and amongst the many arguments he urgeth, that taken from the determined days, and unpassable bounds prefixed to men, is not the smallest: *Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee; thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass. Turn from him that he may rest, till he shall accomplish as an hireling his day.*

These words being the ground of the following Discourse, it is but reasonable I should spend a little time in their explanation,

*Seeing his days are determined, &c.* The word which our Translators render *seeing*, is in the Original **וְכִּי** *if*, which some Expositors think is used by way of query, thus, *If his days be determined?* But the Context seems to warrant our Vulgar Translation, and there is no doubt, but it is very emphatick; for it contains an implicit affirmation, a phrase very ordinary, when the thing for its certainty is confessed and acknowledged. But let us suppose that the words should be rendred by way of query, yet there are two doubts that must be removed, else their quarrelling with our Translation is vain and impertinent. 1. It seems to be very evident, that it has then been a received opinion, that the days of



of men are determined; else *Job* had never made use of this argument, in his pleadings for a cessation from trouble. 2. If *Job* had indeed doubted, that mans days were *determined*, it was no wise nor rational plea, especially since he was pleading with God, who knew whether it were so or not; and since he might have made use of indubitable Topicks. But I pass by this debate as trivial.

*His days, &c,* It is debated by some, why *Job* makes use of the third person, and not of the first. The reason some give is this, because the third person used for the first, denotes contempt and modesty; and therefore *Job* in his low state is pleased thus to abase himself, especially since pleading with his Maker. But this conjecture is not fully satisfactory, for *Job* in several of his other pleas, makes use of the first person; which methinks he would not

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have



have done if he had made use of the third person upon the account of the former consideration; therefore from the promiscuous usurpation of the persons, we may easily conjecture, that when the argument he brings does in a more peculiar manner reach his own private condition, then he makes use of the first person: an instance of this we have *ch. 13. 23, 24. &c.* But now this argument taken from the determined days, and unpassable bounds set to men, is a general one, which all men as well as he might plead; therefore he speaketh in the third person, yet always eying his own condition. The like instance we find in the beginning of this Chapter, *Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble.* Here he speaks in the third person, and not in the first; for to be of few days and full of trouble, is the character of every man.

*Few*

*Few and evil* (says Jacob to Pharaoh) *have the days of the years of my life been,* Gen. 47, 9.

*Are determined, &c.* This word in the Original properly signifieth to *dig or cut thorow*; here it is to be understood metaphorically; because God doth as exactly know the number of mens days, as if the most accurate search were made. 'Tis true, in all humane determinations, it is reasonable that consultation precede. Some space must intervene betwixt their knowing of a thing, and their determinations about it. I confess, it is disputed, whether the Humane Will be of it self a knowing faculty? or if it must follow in its choice the dictates of the intellect? I will not dispute this now; but there is truth in that general Maxim, *ignoti nulla cupido*. But to fancy that there is any such priority between the Divine knowledg and volition, is a gross mistake, irreconcilable with



the Infinite and Eternal perfections of God ; who *uno actu & ictu*, (as they speak) comprehendeth and willeth all future Events.

*The number of his Months are with thee, &c.* This phrase holds out these two things : *First*, the Exactness and Infiniteness of the Divine knowledg ; and *Secondly* the Divine rule and dominion. *First*, it holds out the Divine knowledg to be Infinite and Exact, *The number of his months are with thee.* That is thou art a God whose knowledg reacheth the smallest portion of our time, even to months and days ; thou alone knowest all those circumstances ; and to know the particular portion of days allowed to every man, does certainly require an infinite and exact knowledge. I will not curiously enquire, what truth there is in the pretended diabolical predictions of future Events ; and whether Star-gazers from the Conjunctions

junctions, and contrary Aspects Of Cœlestial Bodies, can foretell the future number of the days and months of terrestrial and inferior Sublunary beings: a passing view of this I will have occasion to take afterwards; at present we rest satisfied with this, that an exact and comprehensive knowledg of our days and months is only the prerogative of him who holds our lives in being; the pretended knowledg any Creature boasteth of, is conjectural and uncertain, if not (as frequently it is) fictitious, unless when the Divine wisdom for some secret, and to us unknown ends, reveals to his creatures such future Events. But *Secondly*, the Phrase holds out the Divine Rule and dominion; *The number of his months are with thee*: that is, they are in thy power, thou may'st either prolong or shorten the days of Men: and I think the meaning of this whole



verse is comprehended under these two heads, which I shall afterwards discourse of at more length.

*Thou hast appointed his bounds,* &c. It is not Fate or Fortune, but the wise God who appoints to every Man his time. Now the bounds set to Men may be considered under a two-fold notion. *First*, As it signifies that common and ordinary Period which the God of Nature has settled, which Men by the common course of Nature may fulfil, if no accidental circumstance hinder: and it seems the Psalmist only understands this common term of Humane Life, *Psal. 90. 10. The days of our years are threescore years and Ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore; &c.* or *Secondly*, It may be understood in a more strict sence, as it is taken for the last moment of every individual and particular person; and of both these I shall more fully discourse after-

afterwards and shew, that the words seem to refer to the common term of Humane Life; or if they mean this perticular term, in what sense they are to be understood, *determined, appointed, &c.*

These and such like condescending Phrases, have been most unhappily used, and sadly misunderstood in the Schools. Some men no sooner read in Scripture of Gods determining or appointing, but they instantly conclude a physical previous necessitating act, which inevitably and irresistibly determines Men: and this kind of determination they plead for in all cases; so that Men even in their vitious actions are irresistibly determined to do so. I know no opinion which has rendred the reformed Church more odious than this: would to God I could say the Censure is causeless, and that I were forced to apologize, for saying our Divines have  
erred



erred in this case. But alas the opinion is grown strong, and not long since it was not much less than Heresie to condemn it : and even to this day it is the study of some Teachers, to instill it into the hearts of their Hearers. For the correcting of this sower opinion, I shall have occasion to add some things in this following discourse ; now I shall desire it to be considered, that while we speak of the Divine determinations, appointment, &c. we speak of things our knowledg cannot reach, the best conceptions we can frame to our selves of the Divine volitions, are dangerous and imperfect ; our capacities in this lapsed state are more narrow than we are aware of : and although they were raised to a higher pitch, yet we can never comprehend his way of working, who in all his ways is unsearchable. 'Tis truly sad to see the contending World so seri-  
ous

ous and restless in digging those deeps that are unfathomable; it were to be wished that Men did not found their pretended knowledge of the Divine volitions, on the basis of their own silly volitions, and did not argue from what we find in our selves to be the same in God. 'Tis true the Holy Spirit hath condescended to express things suitable to our Understanding and mean capacities, therefore we read in Scripture of the Divine determinations, appointments, &c. but yet to abuse such condescending expressions, and to imagine that there were really such purposes, and volitions in God as these we perceive in our selves, this were a heinous crime, pray let us satisfy our selves with this, that God in an eminent and transcending manner doth these things, which we cannot do without willing, decreeing, &c.

*That*



*That he cannot pass, or as others render it, and he shall not pass,* which Phrase is not to be understood, as if the particular Period of every Mans life were so fatally fixed, that he can neither shorten nor prolong it; for this is contrary to many clear Texts of Scripture, as shall afterwards fully appear : but by this Phrase, we are to understand the common term of Humane Life, which is not so mutable as the particular, nor yet altogether so that it cannot be altered ; for God has still reserved in his own power the shortening and prolonging of it. And further, we must not apprehend that the particular terms of Humane Beings are so mutable, that God knows them not, and cannot foretel the precise Period of every Mans Life, or that the Divine Counsel concerning things Future is mutable ; no sure, God has declared the contrary. *I am God,*

God and there is none like me, (saith the Almighty) declaring the End from the Beginning, and from ancient time the things that are not yet done; saying, my Counsel must stand, and I will do all my pleasure, Isa, 46. 9. Two things there be which occasion men to change their purposes and resolutions. 1. Their want of Power to execute them. 2. Their finite and shallow Knowledge, which cannot foresee those future circumstances which render their Designs ineffectual. But now there is no difficulty that can pose the Almighty; with him all things are possible: it is the Prophets argument, the Lord of hosts hath purposed, who shall disannull it? his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back? Isa. 24. 17. And further there is no circumstance or condition that lyes in the dark, and unseen to him, whose knowledge is infinite, and who equally com-



comprehends things past, present  
and to come. Therefore is it  
that man cannot pass these bounds  
perfix'd by the Divine foreknow-  
ledg : But of this afterwards.

*Turn from him, &c* It is quæri-  
ed whether *Job* here petitioneth  
a withdrawing of Gods support-  
ing presence, and a cessation by  
death, or a cessation from the  
affliction and trouble he lay un-  
der. There be Three things that  
plead for the former Interpreta-  
tion. 1. Because the word *חל*  
placed absolutly, signifieth to  
cease by death, 1 *Sam.* 2. 5. and  
*they that were hungry ceased, i. e.*  
*died.* 2. Because the supporting  
hand of Providence being remov-  
ed, men return to the Dust. *Thou*  
*hidest thy face, they are troubled,*  
*thou takest away their Breath, they*  
*dye, and return to their Dust,*  
*Psal.* 104. 29. 3. It is not incon-  
sistent with *Jobs* former desires,  
*Chap.* 3. and 6. *why died I not*  
*from*

*from the Womb? Why did I not give up the Ghost when I came out of the Belly? For now should I have lien [still] and been [quiet;] I should have [slept,] then had I been at [rest:] O that I might have my request, even that it would please God to destroy me!*

That the Phrase can never admit the former gloss evidently appears from the words immediately following, for if Job had been pleading for death, why is that reason added, *that he might accomplish his day?* It is only then a cessation from his grievous affliction that he so earnestly intreated; as if he had said, Lord, thy afflicting hand is heavy, and what am I but weak Dust, not able to bear thy heavy Chastisements? my Soul is overburdened with grief; and wilt thou set thy terrors before me to affright me? hath not poor man in this lapsed state, Troops of miseries attending him



him, from which he may expect no freedom till Mortality be swallowed up in Life? And are not his few days labour and sorrow, pain and affliction? And wilt thou to those inseparable evils, superadd a burthen of pain more grievous and insufferable? O do not measure out so dismal a Condition to thy silly Creature! Make me not the object of thy direful vengeance, but in the midst of wrath remember Mercy. Art thou not Goodness it self, and far more compassionate than the most tender parent? And shall it be said thou hast measured out so acute torments to vex thy poor Creature? I confess Perfection is not the thing I plead; yet may not I say, it is not for my iniquity, nor for my sin, that thou hast afflicted me? And let this Consideration also prevail with thee, that my unlettered friends sadly mistake thy design in afflicting me; they conclude  
if

it is for some secret heinous crime, that thy judgements are upon me: O that thou wouldst turn from thy wrath, that I may enjoy some rest before I go whence I shall not return?

This phrase *turn from him* is sometimes taken in a very bad sense. Thus we find the wicked sadly characterized, as a people who desire God to depart from them, but as it is uttered by the people of God under the pressure of afflictions, it implies no more but a serious desire that God would be pleased to remove that burden. Now in such innocent petitions there appeareth no crime, for it is certain that afflictions simply considered are grievous even to the best of Mankind: *there is no affliction* (saith the Apostle) *for the present is but joyous, but grievous.* It is true, impatience under affliction is an excess which no excuse whatsoever



ever can pardon: there are some persons of such hasty complexions, that they rise in passion against God if they meet with the least affliction; just like that wretched man who said, *this evil is of the Lord, why should we wait any longer upon him?* But those petitions of the Faithful in holy writ, although at the first view they seem to be peremptory and absolute, yet they are truly qualified and submissive; and at the most, only express the harmless resentments of innocent nature, that cannot but express how contrary afflictions are to it.

*That he may rest; ut quiescat sc. paululum;* that his affliction being removed, he may yet enjoy a little space to solace himself, till he accomplish his day. I will purposely decline the answer of that querie, Whether it is lawful to wish death when our condition is charged with a surplussage of calamity;

amity ; for the brevity I design will not suffer me to survey the difficulties of that case, only in the general I shall add two things. 1. If the affliction be violent, fierce, and seemingly durable, rendering us incapable of exercising any duty ; I question not but common reason will suggest to every sober man, that in that case Death is more eligible than Life. Yet 2. since we are ignorant what God designs to us, by sending us such afflictions, it is our part to submit to the Lords will, and say, *Good is the will of the Lord.* Thus, although we may comparatively and submissively wish Death upon the account of some acute trials, yet it is never lawful to be peremptory and absolute in such desires ; for frequently the happy event makes men conclude that *is was good for them. they were afflicted.*

*Rest, &c.* Methinks the very sound of this word is full of ra-



visiting sweetness and pleasure, and yet to those who are staid in a condition of woe and Misery, it is bitter and harsh; as the most ravishing and pleasant Musick is in the Ear of him who is sad: those who never tasted the honey-comb, know not its sweetness: the men who have been always drudges and slaves, have no discerning what Liberty is; and those who from their Birth have been accustomed to pain, know not their misery so sensibly. But to have once enjoyed blessings, and on a sudden to be deprived of them not only the unexpected change, but also their former happiness adds to their misery, and makes their condition more unsufferable. If man had been created to toil and labor, *his eating of bread in the sweat of his face*, had been no curse: but to have been placed in a blessed and happy state, and by his folly to be hurried into a state

state of misery and pain, that compleats his calamity, and makes him sensible, how miserable a thing it is to have been happy.

This single consideration seems to add very much to *Jobs* misery, his condition was once more than ordinary happy; and the amission of the comforts he formerly enjoyed, makes him pathetically cry out, *O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; but now (as he sadly complains) they that are younger than I, have me in derision.*

If *Job* in this state of woe had been perswaded of the certain change of his condition, and that his latter end should be more blessed than his beginning, the expected hopes of this had served to allay and mitigate his sorrow, and to render his case more sufferable and easie. It is the hopes of rest, that puts strength in the wearied



traveller; it was the expected reward and assurance of a future blessedness and better resurrection, which made those Worthies, *Heb.* 11. so cheerfully undergo suffering. What the happiness of the Saints rest is, I am not able to represent, it being so far above any thing we can in this imperfect state conceive or imagine. The advantages that attend our present tranquillity and rest, are many and great, which to enumerate would be prolix and tedious: but if from that, we should frame to our selves an *Idea* of that Celestial Rest, how imperfect would it be? any Rest we enjoy here, is uncertain: an unthought-of causality may impair it, but the Rest that remains for the people of God is everlasting, there is no fear of losing it: Heaven is a place free from trouble, and there is nothing that can imbitter that pleasant state.

Philosophers have a saying *that the end of Motion is Rest.* this is indeed true of all those motions and trials the servants of God meet with; the way to the Kingdom is spread over with thistles; *thorow many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of Heaven:* but those Waves of affliction will quickly over; and when the day breaks, these shadows will flee away. This Winter will soon be past, and *the singing of the Birds will come;* and Christians, who by faith and patience continue in well-doing, shall ere be long be placed in those mansions of Rest, that are in *Emanuel's land.*

Alas, how insensible do we remain under the enjoyment of our outward comforts! when we are blessed with food, liberty, and health, we are but sensibly stupid and ignorant, what is the value of those mercies: but if hunger and



Of the Person  
want begin to pinch us, if our former liberty be hedged in, if sickness and pain seize upon us, then we begin to gather some sense, and we accuse our selves for our ingratitude to God:

*Till he shall accomplish as an Hireling his day:* for the better understanding of this similitude, I shall in four particulars compare the days of man with the days of an Hireling, and in each of them make application to *Jobs* case. 1. The days of an Hireling, denotes a time set, prefixed and limited for the performance of some particular piece of service; and are not the days of man also allotted him for to do his masters business? We were not born to be idle and negligent, sure God had some greater design in the Creation of man than this: now this particular quadrates very well with *Jobs* case, and seems to make the meaning of *Jobs* words  
to

to run thus ; Lord, thou hast given me a being, and appointed me a work to accomplish : but alas while I am thus excruciated with horror and pain, I am unfitted for thy service, the surplussage of misery measured out to me, disables me to go about thy work, be entreated therefore O merciful Father to turn from thy displeasure, remove the present heavy calamity I am overburdened with; that I may yet accomplish the remainder of my time in thy work and service. 2. This set and fixed day of the Hireling is full of pain, labour and toil ; he is (poor wretch) both late and early at work, and seldom has he any intervalls of rest, unless his Master be more than ordinary gentle and benign ; and when he has thus indulged a little ease, he must not with the sluggard say, *O si hoc esset laborare*, he must to his work again, for upon this depends his pay.



payment; no wages is the result of not working; and in some cases stripes and whipping is the fruit of negligence. And what is Mans Life? At the best state it is but sorrow and trouble, till mortality be swallowed up in Life. Our pleasures (upon which we put the highest value) are either purchased, or accompanied with pain and labor. If we be in a prosperous state, our minds are either distracted with care to make it more prosperous; or with fears puzzled and perplexed, lest it be overclouded; and if we be in a low and adverse state, we grieve and repine; nay knowledg, the most excellent of earthly pleasures, is yet in the judgment of the wisest of men, but vexation of spirit; *For in much Wisdom there is much Grief, and he that encreaseth Knowledg encreaseth Sorrow.* The life of Man is not unfitly compared to *Ezekiels Roll*, which was full

full of woes. If one misery or woe passeth, behold another cometh, as one Wave succeeds another. And by all these calamities we may learn what an evil Sin is, the fruit of which are all those calamities we meet with; *in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy Bread till thou return unto the Ground.* And upon this account *Job* may be supposed to plead with God thus; Lord, is not my time at best but lamentable and miserable? And wilt thou superadd to this inevitable misery, a surplussage of pain and affliction? O deal kindly with thy servant who is devoted to thy fear; *Turn from me that I may rest till I shall accomplish as an Hireling my day.* Thirdly, True it is that the Hirelings day is but Labor and Pain; yet the brevity and shortness thereof makes him regard it the less. It is but a day, and that will quickly be over and gone; and what



What is the Life of Man? It is but as a hand breath of a small extension; or like to a passing shadow, which we scarce sooner perceive than it vanisheth. *Man that is Born of a woman is of few days, he cometh forth like a Flower and is cut down*: his decaying is within some few minutes of his budding; as the Poet speaketh of Roses, *¶ dum nascuntur consenuisse Rosas*. Now from this reason Job may be supposed to argue thus; Lord, thou knowest how frail and brittle I am, and if thou contend thus with me, how quickly shall I return to the Dust, I Beseech thee consider that my time is however but short, and let thy goodness appear in removing thy stroke away from me, for I am consumed by the blow of thine hand; *O spare me that I may recover strength before I go hence, and be no more*. Fourthly, The Rest and Wages the Hireling expecteth, makes

makes the accomplishing of his day more easie and tolerable. The word rendered accomplish, signifieth to wish and delight in a thing earnestly; *donec optata veniat dies*. 'Tis a day wished and longed for, and much delighted in when it comes. And indeed the strength of the comparison seems to lye in this, which makes the meaning of *Jobs* words to be this; Lord, now my trouble and pain excruciates and torments me, and my life is more wearisome to me, than the Hirelings day can be to him; therefore turn away thy wrath from me, that in the finishing of my course I may be as jovial and cheerful, as the Hiring is when his day is accomplished: and thus I have done with the Explanation of these words.

The next thing I designed in this undertaking, is to enquire how the days of every Mans Life may be said to be determined; and who-



whether the Period of every Mans Life were so fixed and bounded, that by his care, good managery and use of the means, it cannot be extended; nor shortned by his negligence, intemperance, or exposing of himself to the Famine. Sword, or Plague, it is very certain from this plain Text of Scripture, that the days of every Mans Life are determined; but the manner how, is left unexplained: and this we do not learn from Scripture. And it were to be wished that our curiosity would forbear any enquiry into things that are hid: but alas our inclinations are so wicked and perverse, that *niti-mur in vetitum*, we are always bent and eager in our enquiries after things of a mysterious alloy; and God knows how miserably some men have mistaken in their enquiries after a solution of the present doubt: and if I could promise to my self to rectifie those  
huge

huge mistakes some men have fallen into, this would be a sufficient justification of my present undertaking,

But in order to the unfolding of this doubt, I shall promise four things which will contribute to the better understanding of it.

*First*, There is no doubt that every Mans Life hath a Period. *It is appointed for all men once to dye*; this is a warfare from which there is no discharge: *What Man is he that liveth and shall not see Death?* As to this the Prince and Peasant stand upon even terms, and as the wise man tells us, the rich and poor meet together: there is no jostling in the Grave for precedence. I confess it were not worth the pains to consider the trivial instances, taken from the Translation to *Enoch* and *Elias*, to infringe this position. For first, we are not to debate what God may do, he has a Sovereignty over his



his Creatures, and must not be called to give a reason of his actions; all whose ways are tracts of wisdom and goodness. *Secondly*, We know nothing of the manner of their Translation: he who will positively say, that they did not undergo that which is equivalent to death, will say more than he can prove. I am apt to believe that no sober man will say, that they entered their Heavenly Habitation with their unrefined bodies; no more than those who rise at the sound of the last Trumpet, in the twinkling of an eye, are carried in to Heaven without any change.

*Secondly*, It is also unquestionable, that Sin introduced this Period to every Mans Life; the primitive threatening runs thus, *in the day thou eatest thou shalt dye*. And the Apostle hath as plainly exprest it as it can be, *Wherefore as by one Man Sin entered into the World, and Death by Sin, and so*  
*Death*

*Death passed upon all Men for that all have sinned, Rom. 4. 12.* Where it is plain, that Death is a punishment inflicted for Sin, so that if man had never sinned, we have no reason to think he should have died. I confess without Revelation, we could never have guessed this to be the cause of Death. The Heathen Philosophers were exceedingly confused in their notions concerning the origine of Sin, and the cause of Death: many of them thought that Death was a natural accident, originally appurtenant to Humane Nature. And indeed if Revelation had not declared the contrary, I had been fully satisfied, that Death had been no other thing but such a natural accident; but it is strange that any man that has conversed with sacred writ, should be of this opinion. And yet we find, the *Pelagians* of old were great sticklers for it: hence is it that the an-  
D cient



cient Fathers and Councils have condemned it with a Curse. In the *Milevitan* Council Can. 2. we read thus, *placuit, ut quicumque dicit, Adam primum hominem mortalem factum, ita ut si peccaret, si non peccaret, moreretur in corpore, hoc est, de corpore exiret, non peccati merito sed necessitate naturæ, anathema sit.* In after-ages the *Scotists* (the most subtil of all Scholastick writers) inclined much to this opinion, against whom the *Thomists* (their irreconcilable Enemies) took up the cudgels; amongst modern writers the seemingly rational *Socinians*, have owned this groundless conceit. But I cannot stay to debate this at length, only in brief, if Death had been natural to man in the state of Innocency, it behoved to have been because of these following reasons.

1. Because *Adams* natural constitution implied mortality; the Materials of his constitution were not

not so amicable as to entertain a lasting amity and friendship. 2. It was the primitive precept, *be fruitful and multiply*: now it is plain that procreation includes mortality in its notion; and farther it seems to be unconceivable how this little Map of Earth should have contained a numerous multiplying and never dying offspring. 3. Humane Nature in the state of Innocency did stand in need of Meat and Drink, as is plain from *Gen. 1. 19.* now the end of eating and drinking is not only to hold up, but to repair the decays of our Bodies, which would suddenly return to dust, if they were not thus renewed, and strengthened. 4. If Death were only the effect of Sin, and the Devil were called a Murderer from the beginning, because of his tempting our first parents to eat of the forbidden Fruit, it will follow, that since Christ came to take away the sins of the World,



and to destroy the works of the Devil, that he also took away the wages of sin, which is Death ; than which nothing is more contrary to daily experience. 5. Immortality seems to be entailed only to the state of future Glory, *where Corruption shall put on Incorruption, and Mortality shall be swallowed up in life :* and then there shall be no more death, *Rev. 21.* 4. These are the most material reasons I can find for the proof of this opinion, in answer to which I shall desire the Five following considerations may be weighed.

*Consid. 1.* It is not to be doubted that the eternal wisdom, furnished our first parents with all these accomplishments their specifick nature could suffer : the signatures of Wisdom and Goodness were legible in the lowest and least regarded piece of the creation ; but in Man in a more eminent manner conspicuous. It is almost impossible

ble for us in this fallen state, to conceive what those endowments were, with which his innocent condition was blessed. We have no reason to think that there was any jar or disagreement amongst his faculties, or opposition and fight of one quality with another. It was mans disobedience that disturbed the whole universe, and disordered every part of it; while he was at peace with his Maker, he enjoyed a serene condition, and needed not fear any hurt either External or Internal : then all the parts of his Body entertained a sweet harmony, and there could be nothing except Sin that should have made any failure in his constitution, or made a separation between his Soul and Body. But Sin having entered the World, every part of the universe changed its face; and Man, who was Heavens favorite in his first mould, is now condemned to *eat his bread in the sweat of his*



face till he return unto the dust.

This is all that we can learn from Revelation concerning the introduction of Death; to suppose any other account of it, were to give up our selves to the dictates of our extravagant fancies: and farther, it is very unreasonable to infer mans mortality from his constitution, and because he is earthly; unless we think it also rational, that perfected Bodies, in the state of Glory are not Bodies, or that they are even there mortal; Both which seem to be plainly opposite to Scripture.

*Consid.* 2. The Phrase Immortal, may fall under a double notion: for *First*, sometimes it is taken absolutely, implying a being most perfect, which had no beginning, and can have no end; and in this sense, Immortality is solely the prerogative of our Maker, and can never be attributed to any creature. *Secondly*, Sometimes it is

is taken Conditionally : and so under various considerations it may be attributed either, *First*, To perfected Saints who are stated in Glory, where the primitive Image lost by mans fall, is renewed and perfected ; and of those our Saviour in the Gospel of *Luke* tells us, *that they can dye no more. Luke 20. 36.* or *Secondly*, to our first parents in the State of Innocency. For so long as they remained obedient to the Laws of Heaven, Immortality was entailed upon their nature : for the tenor of the primitive threatning is, *in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt dye* : where temporal Death seems to be threatned, which had been idle and vain if men had died, although they had never eaten the forbidden Fruit. I know some men think that Sin only laid a necessary obligation upon men to obey ; and provoked God to remove that Supernatural and Superadded qua-



lity and gift; which preserved them from Death. With such sort of men I have no great quarrel, although I think that God could as easily have made mans constitution so lasting, and the constituent parts of his fabrick so harmonious, that he should have never dyed if he had not sinned, as to creat a superadded being to preserve him safe. For reason would plead, that that superadded gift required another, and so *in infinitum*.

But farther, 'tis very unreasonable to infer mans corruption from that precept, *be fruitful and multiply*: for although in some sense *generatio unius est alterius corruptio*, yet the state of being, even since the fall, (to which that axiom has only respect) is not so brittle, as that the production of the Child infers the destruction of the parent.

Neither doth that curious query concerning the place for that supposed

posed numerous off-spring, carry with it more reason; for *First*, It is not to be doubted, but the wise Creator who gave being to Man knew well enough how to provide an Habitation for his off-spring. *Secondly*, the Precepts *be Fruitful and Multiply*, carries with it a Limitation, *and replenish the Earth*; so that we can never well conclude from it, that Generation should have continued after the replenishing of the Earth. But *Thirdly*, What suppose this little Map of Earth had not been able to contain so numerous an off-spring, could not God have Translated Man after he had lived some space upon the Earth to some better Habitation, as he did with *Enoch* and *Elijah*?

*Consid.* 3, Though Man in the state of Innocency stood in need of Meat and Drink, yet his nutriment was not noxious and hurtful to him, as now it is. It was  
for



for Mans disobedience that a Curse was upon the ground, before which there was no fear of hurt from the Fruit of the Trees, and the Herbs of the Field : ( which were the only things granted to Men for Food in that state. ) And indeed if we but consider that even in this fallen state, there is a huge difference between the Lives of those who live upon wholesome Food, and observe a moderate Diet ; and of those who are careless in their Diet, and feed upon Husks ; we cannot but think the former Consideration reasonable, especially since that blessed state excluded all manner of excess.

*Consid. 4.* Great and Manifold are the blessed benefits that are conferred upon Mankind, upon the account of his Redeemer : now Man, who was at odds with his Maker upon the account of his Rebellion, is again taken into favor ; and the disobedient World is

is reconciled unto God. And although the being of sin is not quite abolished, yet the Curse is removed; and Death is not properly now a punishment.

*Consid.* 5. Immortality conjoyned with a state of perfect felicity, is reserved for Heavens favourites; In the state of Innocency our first Parents were liable to Death if they rebelled, but the Saints above are confirmed in their Blessed state: and as our Lord Christ tells us, *they can dye no more*. But this much may suffice for the removing the former doubts.

The *Third* thing I premise is, that 'tis very usual in Scripture, as it is in all Languages, to put the Whole sometimes for the Part: thus Man is said to dye, to cease to be Mortal, because the Body is liable to Corruption, and not that the whole Man, or all the Essential constituent parts cease. And thus when we dispute con-



concerning the Period of every Mans Life, we must not foolishly fancy that a Period is ut to the being of the Soul, but only that its union with the body is dissolved: otherwise a dismal stroke would be given to our Religion, and what would become of the vertuous? I confess it is very hard and difficult, to demonstrate the Immortality of our Souls by natural reason: 'Tis true, by reason I may prove that our Natures are spiritual, and that we elicit acts which are beyond the power of matter; but yet we could never be fully ascertained thar there is a Life after this, if Revelation had not plainly discovered it. The Heathen Philosophers very wisely entertained some hopes of a Life after this; upon moral arguments taken from the goodness of God, and his justice in distributing Rewards and Punishments: but alas how doubtful

full were their hopes, and with how much hesitation did they discourse of it ! But by the help of Revelation, these doubts are fully removed, and we now know that there is a Resurrection from the dead, and that the Souls of Believers at death go immediately into glory.

*Fourthly*, Because the explication of terms is very necessary for the unfolding of doubts; I shall consider the twofold notion and acception the period of Humane Life is lyable to. 1. Sometimes it is taken in a large sense, for that common and ordinary Period which the Author of our natures hath settled, which Men by the common course of nature arrive at : Now many learned Men upon good grounds think that this is the determined bounds mentioned in Scripture. 2, Sometimes it is taken for the last moment of every Mans Life at whatever



ever time it happeneth; whether  
 1. In the Beginning of Mans  
 days; or 2. In the midst of his  
 days. Thus the Psalmist prays,  
*that God would not cut him off in  
 the midst of his days.* Or 3. When  
 Men come to be of a good old Age  
 and full of years, as it is said of *A-  
 braham, he died in a good Old Age,  
 an Old Man and full of years, Gen.  
 25. 8.*

That there is such a Common  
 Period of Humane Life seems to  
 be certain and indubitable: we  
 evidently enough perceive that  
 Men in the Age and place wherein  
 we live, exceed not (unless rarely)  
 the bounds fixed upon, *Psal. 90. 10.*  
*The days of our years are Three-  
 score years and Ten, and if by rea-  
 son of more strength they be Four-  
 score years, &c.* And if we shall  
 descend to the Consideration of  
 other Animals and Vegetables,  
 we will find it true enough that  
 the individuals of every specifick  
 nature,

nature, have a common Period which doth not sensibly alter; but where there is a manifest difference of the climate, temperature, and soil. Again, it is very unquestionable that this Common Period hath not been equally extended in all Ages and places. 'Tis true for many hundred years by-past it hath suffered very little alteration, but sure from the beginning it was not so; nor can we upon any good ground be ascertained that it will continue the same that it is now, till the end of all flesh come. Though I will not positively affirm, that Mens Lives will be insensibly shortened, till they become incapable for procreation.

But to determine what hath been the common period of Humane Life in by-past ages of the World, is a *Theme* very difficult and hard: for 1. Although from *Abrahams* time till this present Age it hath altered but little or nothing.



as we may collect from *Gen.* 15. 13. and 16. where a generation is equalled to an Hundred years (as the *Vetſes* collated make it evident;) yet before the Flood, and in ſome few Ages following it, this common Term was not concluded within the ſhort bounds it is now; although then it was indeed exceedingly mutable. Before the fatal Flood we read not of any who lived not above ſeven Hundred years, (unleſs *Abel* who was murdered, and *Enoch* whom God took to himſelf :) nor of any who exceeded nine Hundred ſixty and nine years. Now the common Period not being ſo denominated from ſome few particular inſtances, but from what happens to the moſt of Mankind in every Age who dye a natural death, we may ſuppoſe that Eight Hundred years was the common Period before the Flood. But then after the Flood, the mutability of this common

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mon Period is conspicuous; for in the next age after the Flood, it was cut short two hundred years; and in the next three succeeding generations it was abridged to four hundred years; and in the three succeeding ages to the former it was reduced to two hundred years; and in *Abrahams* time it seems not to have been extended to an hundred years.

In reducing the Life of Mankind into shorter bounds now than it was in the infancy of the World, the Divine wisdom and goodness do very plainly appear: for 1. Although it is true that Sin was the cause of Misery, yet it is manifest that as Men began to multiply, so they became more corrupted; and as the Earth was replenished with Men, so with multiplyed Miseries; and those not only particular, but common. War and bloodshed, slavery and toil, pains and diseases, were in the first ages of the World



very rare and singular; now these  
are ordinary and common: and  
is it not then a great mercy that  
the days of our life are few, since  
so full of evils? But 2. If Men li-  
ved as long now as in the first ages  
of the World, a Land would not  
be able to contain its inhabitants:  
and this is a far greater inconve-  
nience and disadvantage, than the  
shortening the lease of our beings  
can be supposed to be. In the first  
ages of the World, the lives of  
Men were extended, that the earth  
might be replenished; and it is  
very plain, that this common Pe-  
riod was shortened according as  
Man multiplied. I confess God  
threatens to destroy the inhabi-  
tants of a Land for their trans-  
gressions; it was because Men had  
corrupted themselves, that God  
brought a Flood of waters upon  
the World: and yet the Divine  
Justice was accompanied with  
astonishing goodness; for he did  
not

not (as justly he might have) instantly cut off that perverse generation, but he gave them the space of an Hundred and Twenty years to repent. Yet (saith God) *(his days shall be an Hundred and Twenty years, Gen. 6. 3.* That is, although this be a perverse and corrupt generation, yet because Man is but flesh, I will give him this time to repent of his wickedness; and if notwithstanding he will not after such warning mend his manners, I will destroy him. I know many learned Men think that God here only threatens to shorten the common Period of Mens lives, and that it should be contracted within the bounds of an Hundred and twenty years: but this exposition is not agreeable to the experiences of some ages next following the Flood, in which Men lived much longer than an Hundred and Twenty years.



But they say, God uses not to anticipate his time in bringing judgments upon a nation or people: to which I answer, it is very true; but methinks men have no ground to think, that in the present case God anticipates the time in bringing judgements upon them; for we cannot think that *Noah* was compleat five Hundred years old, when God threatned to destroy the World. And indeed any Man who is but a little acquainted with the Jewish custom of reckoning of years, knows how usual it is with them, to name the greater part of any thing for the whole. *St. Austin* is so clear in this, I'll rather set it down in his words than my own: *Intelligendum est hoc Deum dixisse, cum circa finem quingentorum annorum esset Noah, i. e. quadraginta octoginta vitæ annos ageret, quos more suo Scriptura quingentos vocat; nomen totius maximam partem plerumque signifi-*

*significans.* Aug. de Civ. Dei, lib. 15. c. 24.

Thus much I have spoken of the common Period of Humane Life, in respect of the ages of the World. I shall now add a little concerning its changeableness, in respect of places: and I confess in this case it is so variable, that it is a hard matter to pitch upon particulars; only in the general it is certain, that this common Period is not the same in all places: in a temperate Climate this common term is extended; but where there is an excess of heat, or an unconstancy of the weather in those places this common Period is shortned.

But passing this, I come now to consider the particular Period of every mans life: there be two ways it is commonly taken, 1. As it implies the disunion of the parts, by reason of the excess of some one quality or others, or 2.



as it implies the Period of Humane Life whatever way it is occasioned, without any relation either to the defect, or excess of any quality: and thus the learned *Episcopus* states the case in his first Epistle to *Jo. Beverovicus*, But to make this yet more plain, I shall consider that text, 1. *Sam.* 26.10 *As the Lord liveth the Lord shall smite him, or his day shall come to dye, or he shall descend into battel and perish.* Though *David* was anointed King, yet he durst not stretch forth his hand against the Lords anointed; neither would he permit *Abishai*. (who inconsiderately offered) to do it; knowing none could do so and be guiltless. Therefore he comforts and solaces himself with this consideration, that God should rid him of *Saul* one of these three ways: 1. By *smiting him* with some disease; and now to what a numberless number of diseases are our frail

frail natures incident? variety of maladies prey upon frail man, and millions of miseries attend him; *the Pestilence walketh at noon-day*, and the Air which he breaths may blow out the spark of his life. 2.

*Or his day will come*; that is, or he will dye a natural Death; now *Saul* was well-stricken in years, and he knew that by the course of nature he could not live long. 3.

*Or he shall descend into battel & perish*: That is, if some disease cut him not off, or if his day come not, yet he shall be exposed to a violent Death, *or he shall descend into battel*. Sometime a violent Death is purely casual; thus it was with *those eighteen upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell*, *Luke 13.4* Sometimes it is only improperly casual, as when one of two equally exposed to danger is only killed: and sometimes it is only and properly violent, such was *Sauls* death, such was *Achitophels* and *Hamans*.



The way to this discourse in hand being thus far cleared, I shall now prosecute the design of it in this method. 1. I shall set down those erroneous opinion into which some men have unhappily fallen in their enquiry for satisfaction in the present case. 2. I shall lay down the two common opinions that offer fairest for solving this doubt. 3. I shall attempt a full and satisfactory answer: and lastly, I shall conclude with some reflections upon the whole discourse.

I begin with the first to give an account of those erroneous sentiments some men have unhappily embraced in their enquiry for satisfaction in this matter. And that I may shun tediousness, I shall reduce them to the two following heads; 1. Some have foolishly imagined that the Period of Humane Life is fatal and necessary. 2. Others upon the contrary extreme

dream, have as groundlessly thought that it is altogether fortuitous and casual.

Amongst those who ascribe every thing to the dispensation of a sure and inevitable destiny, the *Stoicks* have been always reckoned the chiefest combatants. It is well known that those stupid and senseless Philosophers did teach, that all effects were necessarily produced by the natural order and series of causes, which were from the outgoings of Eternity inseparably chained together; so that neither Humane industry, nor the Divine power could alter what such a conjunction of causes was to produce.

That Humane Industry, care, and good menagery, cannot alter the decree of Fate, the *Stoick* moralist *Seneca* very fairly confesseth.



*Fatis agimur, cedite fati  
Non sollicita possunt cura  
Mutare rati flamina fusi.*  
Seneca in Oedip.

The same Seneca also affirms that the supreme being is so strictly tyed to the *Sempeternal* series and order of Causes, that he must follow, but cannot gain-say what is thus established. *Quicquid est quod nos sic vivere iussit, sic mori, eadem necessitate deos alligat, irrevocabilis humana ac Divina pariter cursus orbit.* Sen. lib. de provid. 5.

There are two very dangerous Authors of great name and fame, who amongst many other bad opinions, have recalled this Stoical Dream, which was long since rejected, the one is the Famous Mr. Hobbs; the other the subtil Author of that Book, entituled *Tractatus Theologico politico*: Both which I may perhaps have occasion

sion to examine more particularly.

But if all things were thus established by a fatal necessity, sound reason would suggest to sober Men, that it were a needless thing for the Sick to call for the Physicians aid. And indeed *Cicer* overy ingeniously confesseth this: *Si fatum tibi est ex hoc morbo convalescere, sive tu medicum adhibueris, sive non adhibueris, convalesces. -- Si fatum tibi est non convalesces, sive medicum adhibueris, sive non convalesces, & alterutrum fatum est, medicum ergo adhibere nihil valet.* *Cic. lib. de fato.* And although *Seneca* thinks he has fallen upon a very good answer, yet it is truly never a whit better. *Cum sanitas (inquit) videatur de fato debetur & medica, quia ad nos beneficium fati per hujus manus venit, lib. 2. nat. cap. 35.* By which means the Physitian is as fatally determined to prescribe the Cure, as the Sick



Sick Mans recovery is Destinac-  
ed.

The Ages in which these Men lived being dark and blind, we ought as much to pity their case, as correct and reprehend them. It is our happiness that we are not left to the conduct of natural reason; and would God our thankful acknowledgments were answerable to the greatness of this Blessing. I shall not need to stand in rejecting this Dream, I think the hazards this speculation hath exposed some of its favourites to, will be forcible enough to affright others from embracing it. I remember I have read of some whom this conceit had so far distracted, that they did cast away their Swords and other weapons when their Enemies approached: Saying, If it be our Fate to dye, to keep our Weapons will never preserve us from Death. 'Tis also reported of the deluded *Mahometans*

*humetans*, that in Battel they take courage from this, that they are no sooner Born, than Fate Seals up-  
on their Foreheads, how long they shall Live, and what death they shall dye. Alas who would not pitty Men thus infatuated and bewitched! Surely, as St. *Augustin* excellently speaks, *Si cor tuum non esset fatuum, non crederes fatum*, Tract. 37. in Joh.

Next the *Stoick* stand the Star-gazers and Astrologers, who attribute the shortness or extension of our Lives to the bad or benign Aspect and Conjunction of the Stars in the time of our Nativity. Now although I deny not that the Heavens have an influence upon inferior things, yet surely this secret and occult dominion Star-gazers plead for, is so manifestly cross to reason and dayly experiences, that no man in his wit will affirm it. The Prophet hath long since advised us, *not to be dismayed at the signs*



*signs of Heaven*; adding, the *Heathens* they are *dismayed* at them: *Jer.* 10. 2. As if it had been only peculiar to the Heathen part of the World, who were ignorant of Gods Providence, to believe the vain predictions of Astrologers. *Babylon* was upbraided for her trusting Astrologers, Star-gazers, and monthly Prognosticators. *Isa.* 47. 13. These Men confidently presumed to foretell the time of Mens Death, and the easily deceived multitude gave a ready assent to whatever they spake: So easily a matter it is to impose any thing upon the belief of the vulgar. The *Palma-ster* as foolishly pretendeth, that God hath sealed upon every Mans Hand how long he shall live, and that observing men (as they would have us believe they are) can understand this by the lines and draughts in the palm of the hand. And for proof of this they alledge, *Job* 37. 7. Where  
it

it is said, *he sealeth up the hand of every Man, that all Men may know his work.* But from this place no such thing can be collected: for *Elihu* is there taken up in expressing the greatness of Gods works, and the Divine power in commanding the Snow and the Rain, small and great, to be on the Earth; and he addeth, *he sealeth up the hand of every Man.* That is, when Snow and Rain are upon the Earth, Men cannot labor and toil; their hand is sealed up, they cannot work.

*Epicurus* and his followers could never be reconciled to this opinion, but yet the account they give of this matter is every whit as extravagant and irrational: they being equally unhappy in the account they give of the beginning and Period of Beings.

The account these Men give of the original of Beings is so incredible, that no rational Man can have  
any



any temptation to believe it; but this belongs not to the present discourse. I shall therefore only consider what they say of the Period of Beings; and briefly their opinion is, that it is no more but the casual and fortuitous separation of those particles of Matter that were united by a happy chance and hit.

This error is of an Old Date, and had long ere now past prescription, if it had not been so suitable to the humors of bad Men. The *Saducees*, whose Religion it was to contradict the *Pharisees*, were very great sticklers for this Dream: Some Men have confined the Divine providence to the Stars, and plucked out sublunary Beings from his immediate Rule and Dominion. *Cicero* could not be perswaded that God had any knowledge of things contingently future. Some to mend the matter, confess God may know the  
gene-

general kinds of things, but they will not allow that he knows every particular. For this they think is inconsistent with the immutability of the Deity: But others have been more illiberal in their concessions, thinking it enough if they grant that God hath a care of Mankind, although he never regard lesser matters: and that,

*Curat magna Deus, fortuna parva  
relinquit.*

By means of these wild conceits this Error has proceeded from bad to worse, yet very few of the old Philosophers, or any other rank of men; ( Atheists those Anomalous births excepted ) had ever that confidence in impiety, to say with the *Epicureans*, that the World is perfectly left to its own fortuitous and casual resolutions, or that I may express it in their Poets own phrase.



*Sive nihil positum est, sed fors in-  
certa vagatur,  
Fertque refertque vices, & habent  
mortalia casum.*

That the Period of every mans life is not so casual and fortuitous as these men imagine, may be made evident by clear testimonies from Scripture concerning the particular Providence whereby God takes care of every particular thing in the World. But because I will have occasion to consider this afterwards, I shall now add only an instance or two from Scripture, whereby it may appear that the most seemingly casual Periods of men are ordered by an infinite Wisdom, and fall under the Divine Rule and Dominion. And first the man-slayer, who killeth his Neighbor unawares, seems to be as casual a business as can be: and yet we may read how far  
the

the Divine providence is conser-  
ned in this particular, *Exod.* 21.  
13. But farther, one of *Epicurus*'s  
Disciples would readily conclude  
that *Ahabs* death was a piece of  
chance, and governed by no Su-  
preme power. It was but an Ar-  
cher's drawing his Bow at a ven-  
ture, which by chance killed *Ahab*.  
But the word of truth informs us,  
that by this means the prophecy  
i *Kings*, 21. 19. was fulfilled: and  
that it came not to pass without  
the Divine providence, who rules  
among the children of Men.

And now I have done with the  
two erroneous extreams which  
some men have inconsiderately run  
to for shelter: the next thing I  
premised was to lay down the two  
common opinions that offer fair  
for removing the difficulty; but  
I must say (for the thing is palpa-  
ble,) that I am now only to give  
the two former rejected opinions  
of the *Stoicks* and *Epicureans*



dressed up in better apparel, and much refined from the impure dregs of Heathenism: as,

1. Some run to the absolute and inconditionate Decrees of God, and tell us, that from the out-goings of Eternity, previous to the Divine consideration of circumstances in which men are to be placed, God has so absolutely determined the period of every mans life, that it can neither be lengthned nor extended by care and diligence; nor shortened by intemperance, Sword or Plague.

2. Others who see the inconveniences and absurdities that follow upon the granting that opinion to be true, are induc'd to believe that the Period of every mans life is ordinarily mutable; and may be both extended and shortened: yet still they grant that God may, as it seems good to him, either extend or shorten it.

There

There are four very considerable particulars that seem to strengthen the first opinion. *First*, There are many plain places of Scripture that conclude the days of every man to be bounded by the Divine determination. *Secondly*, There are many examples in Scripture which shew that the Period of every mans Life is from the out-goings of Eternity, set and bounded in by the Divine will. *Thirdly*, It is a common opinion that the futuration of all things depends upon the Divine will, antecedently to which, things are only possible: and therefore, *Fourthly*, we can never give a rational and satisfying account, how the Divine knowledg concerning the Period of Humane Life is infallible and certain, if it be not founded upon the *Basis* of the sure absolute Decree.

Upon the other hand those who plead for the mutability of the



Period of every Mans Life, endeavor to remove the fore-named doubt, and to shew the great inconveniences it is lyable to: That it quite evacuates the use of the means, and encourages men to expose themselves to any danger; &c. as I shall endeavor to make appear afterwards.

And now I come to the chief thing I aimed at in this undertaking. *viz.* To attempt a satisfying answer of the present doubt, in the prosecution of which intendment I shall observe this Method. *First*, I shall endeavor to shew how the Period of every Mans Life may be said to be determined. *Secondly*, I shall shew in what sense it is not determined: and *Thirdly*, how it is mutable, and may be extended or shortned. I begin with the first, how the Period of every Mans Life may be said to be determined: and I shall endeavor to do this in the two following particulars.

1. The

1. The Period of every mans Life is so far determined that it is not without a Period. To determine, signifieth properly to set bounds or limits to any thing. Now since *it is appointed for all men once to dye*, every mans life is enclosed & bounded within a certain number of years. And I must add, that if I be not very much mistaken, this is the genuin sense of the most, if not of all, those places of Scripture that express the determination of Mans days: and indeed *Jobs words, seeing his days are determined, &c.* seem to mean no other thing but this; and in this sense it is unquestionable that God has *appointed our bounds which we cannot pass.*

But 2. the Period of every particular Mans Life is determined in respect of the Divine prescience. Now because this is a very considerable particular, and, as I told in the explaining of the text, that



which was intended by Job when he says, *the number of his months is with thee*; I shall therefore endeavor to make out this truth by the plainest and most convincing evidence that can be.

In order to this I shall shew that God hath a perfect comprehension of all things, past, present, or to come; and by consequence fore-knows the Period of every Mans Life. *Secondly*, I shall prove this by plain evidence from Scriptural Examples. *Thirdly*, I shall make it appear, that it is solely the prerogative of our Maker to know the Period of every Mans Life. And *lastly*, I shall answer the most Material objections and doubts that are brought against it. *First*, that God hath a perfect comprehension of all things past, present, and to come, is so reasonable a principle of natural Religion, that it hath been generally owned

owned by the wisest and most learned Heathen. And those impious wretches who at every turn take the name of God in vain, in attesting him in the truth of what sometimes themselves know is false, sufficiently imply that they believe Gods Infinite knowledg. Besides the truth of this is planly held out in Scripture; it was to this City of refuge *Peter* did flee when his love was seemingly called in question; *Lord* (says he) *Thou knowest all things*, *John* 21. 16. And the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews* makes use of this Topick to induce us to circumspection, *all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do*, *Heb.* 4. 13. and God himself appeals to the infinity of his knowledg in the demonstration of his Deity, and challengeth the Idol-Gods to produce their cause; and shew what shall happen that the latter end of things may



*may be known, Isa. 41. 21. 22.*  
The Psalmist upbraids the Idol-Gods, in that they have eyes and see not : but he always comforts himself with this consideration, that the God in whom he trusts does behold his condition ; all which instances make it undoubtable that God hath an infinite cognizance, and that nothing can be hid from his eyes, who equally beholds things past, present, and to come.

Now if it be so plain and evident that God hath such an Infinite knowledg, no Man can reasonably doubt that God knows the Period of every Mans Life ; but if any shall ask how is it that God knows certainly the Period of Humane Life, I answer, that it is a very bold and fruitless enquiry, which concerns not us to know ; his understanding is infinite, and shall silly Man think to comprehend and measure it by his finite know-

knowledg? The Psalmist modestly acknowledgeth that *such knowledg is too wonderful for him, it is high* (says he) *I cannot attain unto it, Psal. 139.6.* And elsewhere he tells us, *it is only bold Atheists who ask, How doth God know, and is there knowledg in the most high?*

I confess the Schoolmen(as they are called) weary themselves with such vain Disputes, and they are as peremptory in determining the manner of Gods knowledg of future things, as if they had proved their assertions with Mathematical demonstrations. Some of them tell us, that things future are really present with God in Eternity; which methinks is a very noble Paradox. Others run to the Divine decree, and make it the *Basis* of the Divine knowledg. Others tell us that God in contemplating his own essence sees all the representations and *Ideas* of future things; and



& therefore knows them certainly. We might add many other conjectures, but these may let us know how vainly curious such wits are: but that which may satisfy any sober enquirer is this, that God is Infinite in knowledg, and therefore knows certainly the Period of every Mans Life, it being truly future.

The Second thing I premised was to prove that God knows the Period of Humane Life by examples from Scripture. Now I think this will need but little proof, since the predictions concerning the Period of persons are so many and plain; so many Hundred years foretold, & so punctually fulfilled without a failure in a tittle. The death of *Eli's* Two Sons, *Hophni* and *Phineas* was foretold. 1 *Sam.* 2. 24. And punctually fulfilled, as we may read, *Chap.* 4. 11. both the manner & place of *Jezebel's* death was foretold, & *the Dogs shall eat*  
*Jezebel*

*Jezebel in the Portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her, 2 King 9. 10.* Which prediction was fulfilled without a failure in any circumstances, as we read in the close of that Chapter. But the most remarkable instances are those manifold predictions concerning the death of Holy Jesus: *All the prophets* (as the Apostle observeth *Act. 3.*) *have foretold that Christ should suffer; they have condescended upon the manner of his suffering, upon the time, and upon the circumstances relating to it.* The Psalmist in a figurative Speech, (a very usual way of expressing things amongst the Prophets) speaks of his being pierced; so doth the Prophet *Zechariah, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, Zech. 12. 10.* *Daniel* did punctually speak of the time. *And after Threescore and Two Weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself, Dan. 9. 26.* But



But farther, God doth not only know the actual, but also the possible bounds of every Mans Life; that is, God doth know that a Period should have been put to the days of many Men, if they had not by their hearty repentance and Devout Prayers prevented its lash. It was King *Hezekiah's* Prayer to God that extended his Life Fifteen years, for the message which God did send to *Hezekiah* was this; *Set thine House in order; for thou shalt dye and not live.* But he having prayed to God gets this return; *I have heard thy Prayer, I have seen thy tears, behold I will add unto thy days fifteen years, Isa. 38. 5.* From which it is plain, that God knew that a Period should have been then put to his days, if his Prayer had not prevented it. It was the people of *Nineveh's* repentance that prevented the threatned judgment that should have put a Period

riod to their lives. Which Method if the old World had observed, they had prevented that Fatal Flood in which they were drowned.

*Thirdly*, That it is onely the prerogative of God Almighty to know the Period of every Mans Life, will be easily granted. For those who deny Gods universal cognizance, will never attribute it to any creature: and those who do acknowledg the infinity of the Divine knowledg, will never say it belongs to the creature. The only things that we are to consider are these pretensions to a fore-knowledg of things which the Heathen world bragged of, but this Plea is easily removed. For 1. in those dark ages of the World it was an easie thing to impose upon the faith of the vulgar, who in all ages have been very credulous and apt to be thus deceived. *Secondly*, It is well known that there pre-



pretended predictions were very *enigmatical* and dubious. *Aio te Æacida Romanos vincere posse*, was a Problem, rather than a Prophecy, which might have concluded both ways. *Thirdly*, The most part of their pretended predictions were only guesses and conjectures, which for the most part were false and groundless; yet *Fourthly*, I do not deny but God may for ends known to himself reveal the Period of particular persons, when, and to whom he thinks fit. It is therefore singly the property of God Almighty who grasps all times, and who can never be impeached for giving a wrong divination, to know the Period of every Mans Life.

In the last place I come to consider those Material doubts and objections this principle may be urged with. As 1. It is hardly credible that God doth certainly know the Period of Humane Life,  
it

it being only contingently future: this objection *Cicero* could not answer, therefore being perswaded that some things were contingently future, he thought God could not know such things. But the difficulty is not so great as to make us deny God hath perfect knowledg of things contingently future. For 1. The light of nature may teach us that we must not reject what is plain, because we cannot comprehend what is obscure. That there is in man a rational Soul is beyond doubt; and yet how irreconcilable are the opinions of learned men about its original, whether it be by seminal production, or by immediate creation. Again the union of Soul and Body is a very mysterious riddle; and the most ingenious *hypothesis* has been confessed to be unsatisfactory; and yet no man was ever so far infatuated as to deny that in man there is a Soul and

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Body



Body. In like manner, what altho  
 Humane Reason cannot reconcile  
 the Divine knowledg with the  
 contingency of actions? yet may it  
 not rest satisfi'd with this, that God  
 knows all contingencies, because  
 his understanding is infinite. And  
 indeed the predictions in Scripture  
 are so remarkable and plain evi-  
 dences that God knows all things,  
 that now it cannot be reasonably  
 questioned. But suppose; Revela-  
 tion had taught us nothing of this,  
 yet we might by natural princi-  
 ples know that God is the most  
 perfect being that can be imagi-  
 ned, and therefore of Infinite com-  
 prehension; that he is our Maker,  
 and therefore must know all the  
 intrigues of his creatures.

But *Secondly*, the Divine fore-  
 knowledg is not the cause of  
 things (for otherwise criminal acti-  
 ons which do not escape his eye,  
 should be caused by him who can  
 not tempt any man to sin) which

is impossible: if God should reveal to me that *Titius* were certainly to do such a thing the next day, my foreknowledg does not necessitate *Titius* to do that act: so that upon the one hand as the foreknowledg of it hath no influence upon the manner of its production, nor crosseth the Humane liberty; for the Divine foreknowledg is not the cause why things exist, but it supposeth the existence of things: so upon the other hand the contingency of the Period of Humane Life does not infer, that it cannot be certainly known by an infinite understanding who grasps all things and seasons.

But the great difficulty is, how the Divine foreknowledg can be reconciled with the Divine promises, commands, comminations and prohibitions: how it can consist with the Divine wisdom and Goodness, to threaten men with shortness of life if they con-



tinue wicked and rebellious; and to promise length of days if man will obey his commandments, while-as he well knows that the wicked man will continue in his wickedness, and be filthy still, and that the vertuous and good man will persevere in well doing.

I confess, this is a very great difficulty, and hath induced many learned men to doubt if God knows things contingently future, not that they would impeach any of the Divine perfections, or derogate from the infinity of his knowledge; but only they think that the nature of things contingently future, is such that they cannot be known; as it is no diminution from Omnipotency, to say things impossible, or which imply a contradiction, fall not under its object.

But yet since Scripture hath so clearly revealed to us the Divine foreknowledg of future actions, methinks he is very rash and inconsistent

considerate that doubts it : it is a remarkable sentence of *Tertulian's Præscientia Dei tantos habet testes, quantos fecit prophetas*. Hence the learned *Episcopi* tells us, that his Religion and the reverence he had to the Divine Majesty would never suffer him to admit this argument, which reflected so much upon the truth of Divine Predictions.

But I answer more particularly, that Gods promises and threatenings are serious, because although God knows that some men who are threatned will continue in their wickedness, yet it being in their power to turn from their Sins, and the Divine threatening being an argument which should prevail upon men ; no man can doubt but God is serious with sinners in such cases. If a parent did certainly know that his Son were to commit a criminal act, would any man think that that Parents threatening of



his Son, if he did commit that act, were void of sincerity. But 2. As God knows that some wicked men, notwithstanding of the severest threatening, will continue in their sins: yet 1. He knows that even such obdurate persons may do otherwise, and 2. He knows that many men would have continued in their sins, if they had not been threatned with punishments. We have no reason to think that the people of *Ninevie* would have turned unto God if they had never been threatned. Now though God knew that *Ninevie* when threatned would repent, yet since he also knew that if they had not been threatned they should have continued in their wickedness; therefore no man can question the seriousness of the Divine threatnings.

And thus I have dispatched the first particular, how the Period of every Mans Life may be said to be determined. I come in the next place

place to enquire in what sense it is not determined. Now because I have already rejected the *Stoical* fate, all that I shall speak concerning this head may be comprehended in these following particulars: *viz.*

The Period of every Mans Life is not fatally limited and bounded by any absolute or inconditionate decree of God Almighty. Now because many learned men violently urge, that God hath from the outgoings of Eternity absolutely decreed the bounds of every Mans Life, without any consideration of those circumstances in which they are to be placed; so that men, do what they please, can neither extend nor shorten the lease of their life: I shall therefore endeavor to make this assertion plain, and remove those objections that it may seem lyable to; and the rather, because in such kind of assertions as are besides the common opinion, men will be ready to suspect some sinister design. That



That the Period of every Mans Life is not Fatally determined by any secret unconditional decree, will appear from the arguments we shall make use of in proving the inability of the Period of every Mans Life. Now I shall only consider those absurdities and inconveniencies that follow upon the admission of the contrary opinion. As *first*, if the Period of Humane Life were Fatally determined, then those wretched miscreants who with their own hands put a Period to their Lives, may easily excuse themselves before their Judg: for since it is supposed that they are physically predetermined to do so, how can it be imagined that they could do otherwise? is there any resisting of the Divine decree? alas, it was not in their power to help it, and how then can they be condemned for it? It is a known Maxim, *Nemo peccat in eo quod vitare non potest*:  
The

The necessity they are placed in, seems to excuse their sin, but if notwithstanding we shall suppose that such brutish actions are really criminal, we run our selves upon another absurdity, and that is we reflect upon the Divine holiness and goodness; for if God has truly determined those brutish actions by a previous, secret, and unalterable decree, if he hath before irrevocably determined, and so intangled in such a train of causes as should necessarily make them offer violence to themselves; how can we vindicate the Divine Sanctity from the blot of being the Author of sin? Alas, dayly experience shews us, how apt Men are to make use of this argument for their own vindication, when they do what is criminal; they tell us they were fatally determin'd by an external power in acting them. And with this consideration they solace themselves, as if they were as innocent as Fools or Mad-Men Be



But let no Man deceive himself in arguing so foolishly, the Apostle St. James, very forcibly rejects this opinion. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed,* Jam. 2.

13, 14. The wise Man in his sense, after the certainty of things, concludes his Seventh Chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes thus, *Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright: But they have sought out many inventions.* Pray then let us reject every opinion that teacheth God does necessitate Men to sin, for nothing can be more injurious to God than this. To think to palliate the business by saying God is under no Law, is but a lawless and unreasonable pretext; for the everlasting rectitude of his spotless nature,

is more than any external Law: and pray, what can truth and Justice do, but what is holy and Just? The distinction between the act and the pravity of the act, the former of which God determines Man to; but not to the latter, is as vain and frivolous. For the pravity of every wicked act is inseparable from it. And farther, the Divine commands particularly prohibit the act, and I think upon no other ground, but because the formality of Sin consists in the act it self. It is indeed strange to consider those Platonick and imaginary notions some Men run to: But I think it needless to take a particular view of such Dreams.

But as this opinion sadly reflects upon the holiness of God, so it is highly inconsistent with the liberty of Mans Will in the choice of the means. That there is a free principle in Man, is so plain, that he who denies this, must engage himself against



gainst Experience and Reason. There is no Man who does wickedly, but he perceives he may do otherwise: the sick man is not constrained to neglect the means for his recovery; neither is the Physician forced to prescribe this and no other remedy: Men act not as Machines, but they have a Free Principle, whereby they may chuse what they think is best and most convenient: It's true, the Will, since *Adam's* Fall, is corrupted, and most-ly enclined to that which is evil; but yet the Fall did not destroy Man's Freedom, it made no Phys-ical change, only the Faculties of the Soul are morally vitiated and corrupted.

But if the Will were Physically (as they speak) determined *ad unum*, it were unreasonable to think that the Sick person, who neglects the means, could do otherwise. And alas! doth nor Experience convince us, that Men of this perswasion neg-lect

lect the use of lawful means which God hath appointed, only because they Dream that if God has decreed that they shall dye, then it is needless to use the means; and if God has determined that they shall live, whether they use or neglect the means, they shall live.

But you'l say, God doth not only Decree the *End*, but also the *Means*. I answer, this Plea doth not a whit diminish or remove the difficulty, since they suppose that the Means are as absolutely decreed as the End: which quite destroys the liberty of Mans Will, and leaveth no place for any choice.

Thirdly, This opinion leaves no place for praise to the Learned Physician, nor for dispraise to the unskilful Empyrick. First, The skilful Physician can claim no praise; for although it be grant'd that he hath wisely considered the condition of the Sick, and the nature of the Disease; though he hath prescribed apt Remo-



Remedies, and in all things behaved well, yet since he did no other thing but what he was determined to do by an external force, who can think he merits any praise, If he could have done otherwise but would not, then he might in reason claim it; but the case according to the present *Hypothesis* is quite opposite. But, Secondly, neither can we in reason blame the unskilful *Quack-Doctor*, who neither knows the nature of the Disease, nor of those Medicines he prescribeth. Alas! poor man does no more than what he was forced to do, and he could not do otherwise; why then should he be blamed for any failure or mistake he commits.

Fourthly, The natural and genuine Consequence of this Doctrine, is, to make men like Fools or Mad-men, expose themselves to any danger: For instance, What need we be afraid to run upon any Precipice, if God hath determined the

The Period of every man's life, there is no fear to encounter with any seeming danger; men may safely enough leap into the fire, or cast themselves into the deep, for there is no fear that they shall be hurt or perish, unless the Almighty hath determined it; and if this be, they may perswade themselves they could not do otherwise, for the Decree is unalterable and cannot be repealed.

Nor is this true only in Theory & Speculation, but it may appear to have such bad effects, by the sad experience of poor deluded Creatures. Alas! do we not hear the Vulgar frequently comfort any who are in trouble with this consideration, that God hath decreed it should be so, if these persons did only mean that God exerciseth a special Providence in the world, and ruleth among the Children of men, no body had ever blamed them: but this is not their meaning, for they



they plainly declare by such kind of speech, that all things come to pass fatally. I have heard some wretched Sinners, who had committed great and scandalous sins, excuse themselves, by saying, they were decreed to do so, and God's will must be accomplished.

It were very easie to multiply many Absurdities which flow from this Doctrine by a natural Consequence; but these few I have named may abundantly satisfy every considering man, and shew him how pernicious and dangerous it is; but before I conclude, I shall consider the four Arguments I mentioned before, which I said, seemed to strengthen and confirm this Opinion, as

First, *There are many places of Scripture which seem to conclude, That the Period of every Man's Life is determined.* I shall mention some of the most remarkable Texts of Scripture brought to defend this, as first

first, *Psal. 31. 15. My times are in thy hand, deliver me from the hand of mine Enemies.* From hence some draw this unexpected Conclusion, That God hath absolutely decreed the Period of every Man's Life. Now I think no considering man should ever have guessed this to be the Psalmist's meaning; for the Text only holds out the Divine care and Providence, whereby he does superintend and continue every individual thing in the world in their Beings, and therefore is it that *David* makes his application to God, that he would deliver him from the hand of his Enemy; which methinks had been a needless Petition, if he had imagined that God had absolutely determined the period of his Life. Secondly, *Psal. 39. 5. Lord, make me to know mine end, & the measure of my days what it is, that I may know how frail I am.* This place is strangely brought to confirm the former Opinion: For the



Psalmist doth not desire the knowledge of the Period of his life; he does not ask when he shall die, only he begs the Divine aid and assistance, that he may wisely improve the short time he hath to live. I cannot stand to consider such Texts of Scripture as these, which are no ways acquainted with the Doctrine they are brought to defend. There is only one Text that seems to favor this Opinion, *viz.* Job 14. 5. *Seeing his days are determined, the number of his Months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bonds that he cannot pass.* But I have considered this all along in this Discourse. I confess, some in return to this say, that all *Job's* words are not approved of God, therefore it is hard to conclude any thing from them; but this is a very insufficient answer. That which satisfieth me is this, that *Job* here only says that our days are determined, but he speaks nothing how they are determined.

terminated; now in what sense the Period of every Man's life may be said to be determined, I have already considered.

Secondly, *There are many Examples in Scripture, which shew that the Period of every Man's Life is bounded and limited by an absolute Decree.* The most remarkable is, that *Act. 4. 28. Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, & the people of Israel were gather'd together for to do whatsoever thy hand & thy counsel determined before to be done:* The Scribes & Pharisees frequently stirr'd up the multitude. *to lay hands upon Christ*, but their endeavours were always to no purpose; and the account the Scripture gives for this, is, *because his hour was not come.* In return to this, I shall desire it may be considered, that when we say the Period of every Man's Life may be extended or shortned, the meaning is not, that it is impossible that it



can be otherwise: we never doubted but the great Governor of the World may make what reserved Cases he pleases from the ordinary course of things; and no wonder though the present Case, which is upon all accounts so extraordinary, be exempt from the general Rule; and for such exempt Cases, to which there ought to be allowance made, no reasonable man can think they do any prejudice to the thing I have been proving.

Thirdly, *It is a common opinion, that the futurition of things depend only upon the Divine will; antecedently to which things are only possible.* In answer to which, I easily grant, that there is nothing that comes to pass contrary to the Divine will; the most criminal actions are ordered by his Infinite Wisdom; and permitted to be. But yet we have no ground to think that he decrees every future action.

Else

Else it were hard to vindicate the holiness of God; upon which consideration many Learned Men have been induced to deny Gods immediate concurring with the Creature in all its operations; and yet we need not run our selves upon this Rock; for we may safely enough maintain that the Divine will is immediately efficacious; for God who created man with a freedom of will, designed that he should act without constraint, and the reason why man acts freely, is because God wills men to act so; which plainly discovers, that the most contingent actions depend immediatly upon the Divine will.

Fourthly, *We can never give a rational nor satisfying account how the Divine knowledg concerning the Period of Humane Life is infallible & certain, if it be not founded upon the sure Basis of an absolute decree.* This object I have partly removed already, while I shewed that



God knows whatsoever is true, because his cognisance is Infinite; wherefore it is unreasonable to think that God could not have a perfect comprehension of things, if he had not decreed them absolutely. Now to make this yet more plain, I shall prove by instances from Scripture, that God hath a certain knowledg of those things which he never decreed: as absolutely future. And *First*, It is a very remarkable instance which we have, 1 *Sam.* 23. 11, 12. where *David* hearing that *Saul* was to come to *Keilah*, he earnestly beseecheth God to tell him, if the men of *Keilah* will deliver him and his men into the hand of *Saul*; and if *Saul* will come down. To both which he gets this answer, *That Saul will come down*; and that *the Keilites will deliver him up*. And yet the Event shews that none of those came to pass, because the fulfilling of both did depend upon *David's*

*David*s staying in *Keilah*. And yet God certainly knew, that if *David* had not depart'd from *Keilah*, they should have delivered him into the hands of *Saul*. And farther it is very evident, that *David* was not inquiring what were the present propensions, and inclinations of the *Keilites*; but what should be the event of his staying, and accordingly he receives an answer from God. Another Instance we have 2 *Kings* 13. 19. where *Elisha* the Prophet is very wroth with *Joash* King of *Israel*, because he did not smite upon the ground five or six times; and the reason the Prophet adds, is *for then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it*. Which makes it as evident as any thing can be, that God foreknew that *Joash* should have smitten *Syria* till he had consumed it, if he had smitten upon the ground five or six times. It were no difficult task to prove this by a multitude of instances from



Scripture, but I think I need add no more for the satisfaction of considering Man; and for others, a Million of demonstrations will be urged to no purpose. And thus I have done with the Second thing I proposed, that God hath not by any absolute or inconditionate Decree fatally determined the Period of every Mans Life.

I proceed to the Third thing proposed, namely, whether the Period of every Mans Life be mutable. And before I prove it to be so, I must premise two cautions. *First*, when we say the Period of every Mans Life is mutable, we mean no more but that it may be shortned by our intemperance, or neglect of the means; and be extended by our good managery and religious manner of living. *Secondly*, When I say the Period of every Mans Life is moveable, the meaning is not that it is necessarily so, and that it cannot be otherwise; for this would  
not

not be consistent with our dependent condition; therefore there is allowance to be made to extraordinary cases. The acts of Divine providence in the government of Humane affairs, are sometimes extraordinary, and therefore it must be left to his Infinite Wisdom and Goodness, to make what reserved cases he thinks fit from the general rule. Yet for ordinary, the Period of Humane Life is mutable; and God doth not exclude the power of second causes in governing the World.

These things being premised, I doubt not but to offer such arguments for the proof of the mutability of the Period of every Mans Life, as shall be sufficient for the conviction of any man who is not blinded by prejudice, or prepossess'd with some contrary notion. And

*First*, Upon the observance of the Divine laws, there are many promises in Scripture assuring us of  
length



length of days; and on the other side, there are many threatnings of cutting short the days of the wicked. Thus God promises length of days to obedient Children. *Ex. 26. 12. Honor thy Father & Mother, that thy days may be long upon the land, which the Lord thy god giveth thee. Deut 4 40. Thou shalt keep therefore his Statutes and his Commandments which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, & with thy Children after thee, & that thou may'st prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy god giveth thee: & particularly the Lord tells Solomon, 1 King. 3. 4. If thou wilt walk in my ways to keep my statutes & my Commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.* The Psalmist encourageth men to consider the case of the poor upon this Motive. *Psalm 42. 1, 2. Blessed is he that considereth the Poor, the Lord will preserve him & keep him alive, &c.* And  
upon

upon this account the Wise-Man also perfwadeth men to observe and keep Gods laws. *Prov. 3. 1, 2. My Son forget not my law, but let thine heart keep my Commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace shall they add to thee.*

How much the observance of the duties of Religion conduce to our health, is a thing daily experience attests; and therefore the Apostle very excellently exhorts *Timothy, to exercise himself unto Godliness, for it is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come, 1 Tim. 4. 8.* Religion is as a bridle to keep men within due bounds in their eating and drinking; it forbids all manner of excess which impares our bodily health, and obliges men to make use of lawful means for their preservation and recovery. If we consult experience, we shall find these to be the men who for ordinary enjoy the longest lives: it



is true some good men may be naturally of a brittle constitution, and others God may remove for secret ends known to himself; yet for ordinary, the Godly man, whose natural temper is strong, hath the advantage of the wicked man; and certainly Religion in its due tendency prescribes the best rules for long life.

*As Righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil (as the Wise-Man tells us) pursueth it to his own death, Prov. 11. 19. We have a large Catalogue of the Punishments inflicted for sin, Exod. 26. Where more particularly v. 16. the Lord threatens to appoint over those who obey not his Laws, terror, consumption, and the burning ague: & that Men may not foolishly think all these are but threatnings which God intends not to inflict upon poor Man, the Prophet Isaiah tells us, if ye refuse to rebel, ye shall be devoured with the Sword, for the*  
Mouth

Mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, Isa. 1. 20. And the wise-man concludes it as certain, Prov. 10. 27. *The years of the wicked shall be shortened:* & to conclude, the Psalmist also tells us, *bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days.* Psal. 55. 23. which the Poet very well expresseth.

*Ad Generum Cereris, sine cæde ac  
sanguine pauci;  
Descendunt Reges. & sicca morte  
Tyranni.*

And the truth of this may be evident likewise from common Experience, by which it will appear, that no men are so obnoxious to Diseases as the wicked, who spend their time *in chambering and wantonness, in riot and excess.* Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? who hath wounds without cause? they that tarry long at the wine, Prov. 23. 29, 30. What the Wise-man says of one kind of Vice, may be said of all, *They lead down to the Chambers of death,*



*death*, Prov. 7. 27. But these things are so obvious, that I need not to enlarge upon them. I shall conclude this Argument with this consideration, that since God Almighty promises to extend and lengthen out, or prolong their life, who walk piously and observe his Statutes, and threatens to shorten the days of the wicked, who refuse to obey his Laws, it cannot be rationally imagined that the Period of every Man's Life is absolutely determined.

Another Argument to confirm our Assertion, may be taken from the pious & devout prayers of the righteous, and their turning from their sins by an hearty repentance, both which conduce to the lengthening out of their days. I put Repentance and Prayer together, because of their near affinity to one another. Now that both these may be the Moral Cause of extending our Lives, may appear to be true

true from common Experience, be-  
sides the many Assertions and Pro-  
mises in Scripture to this purpose.  
First, The truth of this may be e-  
vident from Experience, by which  
it will appear, that if Men had  
hearkned to *Noah's* Doctrin, if they  
had repented of their wickedness  
within the space allowed to them,  
they had not perished in the De-  
luge of Water. Of repenting *Nine-  
veh* we read, *That God saw their  
works, that they turned from their  
evil way, & God repented of the evil  
he had said that he would do unto  
them, and he did it not,* *Jonah 3.*  
*10.* It was *Hezekiah's* Prayers and  
Tears that prolonged his life. Go  
(saith the Lord to his Prophet *Isai-  
ah*) and say to *Hezekiah*, *Thus saith  
the Lord, the God of David thy Fa-  
ther, I have seen thy tears, behold  
I will add unto thy days fifteen  
years,* *Isa. 38. 5.* And if prayer were  
of no force, to what purpose were  
men so earnest in their sickness, to  
beg



beg the prayers of others on their behalf. I confess if the Period of every Mans Life were fatally determined, our Prayers should be very needless. For can we be so senseless as to imagin, that our Prayers can move God to change his unalterable Statutes and Decrees.

But besides common experience, the truth of this is likewise attested by plain evidences from Scripture. *At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, & concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, & to pull down, and to destroy it; If that Nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a kingdom to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them Jer. 11. 7, 8, 9, 10* Methinks this is so plain an evidence of the efficacy of repentance, that  
no

no reasonable man can have any doubt concerning it. But alas! if God had from the outgoings of Eternity fatally determined the destruction of Nations and Kingdoms by an absolute and inconditionate decree, Repentance could never alter the determination.

It is the Apostles advice, *Jam. 5. 14. Is any sick among you? let him call for the Elders of the Church, and let them pray over him.* I know there are other means to be made use of in order to the procuring of health than repentance and prayer, and of these we shall speak anon: but yet this I think may be truly said, that sometimes, when all other remedies have been either ineffectual or not to be had, repentance and prayer have done the business, and completed the cure. And surely these are duties profitable at all times.

I know the Church of Rome tell us many extravagant Stories of the



and miracles that have  
been performed by the prayers of  
Holy Men: those I shall not now  
mention, only I shall say, that al-  
though it is not credible that the  
Prayers of Saints upon the Earth,  
do either mitigate and alleviate the  
pains of those that are in Hell; or  
free them from that miserable  
state, (as some men have confident-  
ly enough reported :) yet it is suffi-  
ciently credible that *the effectual  
servent prayer of the righteous a-  
vaileth much*, Jam. 5. 16.

A Third Argument to prove that  
our lives may be extended or short-  
ned, may be taken from the use of  
medicaments. Common reason will  
teach Men, that it is needless to  
prescribe any Medicine to those  
that are dead; and truly the case  
would be much alike, if the Period  
of every Mans Life were determi-  
ned by an inconditionate Decree.  
For although men might then  
make use of medicaments, yet I  
think

*of Humane Life.*

think I may truly say that their operation should be very ineffectual. But that men may to good purpose employ the Physitian when they are sick, and expect by the blessing of God, benefit by the use of Medicaments applied by the art of Physick, no reasonable man can doubt.

That the lives of many have been lengthned and prolonged by the excellent remedies, applied by the expert and skilful Physitian, is a truth so obvious to common experience, that I need not enlarge upon it. And on the other side, how many have died before their time, only by their imploying ignorant Physitians! It is a famous instance that we have recorded of one *Manes*, the Father of the *Manichees*, who having returned into *Persia* at that time when the Kings Son lay sick of a dangerous disease, he amongst many other Physitians was present: all the others plainly declared that the disease was

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dangerous; but *Manes*, who was only a pretended Physician, confidently desired that they might be all removed, and he would take care of the Kings Son, and withal promised to restore him to health in a short space; but the event was quite contrary, for within a short time the Kings Son died; which did so provoke the King of *Persia*, that he instantly caused *Manes* to be put to a miserable Death. What mischief has been done by unskilful Physicians, to many sad examples do daily attest; but yet if the Period of every Mans Life were determin'd by an absolute and in-conditionate decree, no man could blame the ignorant Physician, nor needs any person be troubled if they neglect the means; for God had determined they should do so, which indeed makes *Marthas* speech to our Lord Christ to be ridiculous, *if thou hadst been here my Brother had not died.*

That

That *Naaman* the *Syrian* should wash himself in the River of *Jordan* seven times, and then be clean of his Leprosie, was indeed miraculous: But yet it is plain, that if he had not done so, his Leprosie had remained.

Whether that custom in the primitive Christian Church of anointing the sick with Oyl was miraculous, or not, I shall not dispute; but this is certain, that it was then a means used for the recovery of the Sick.

There is one objection which some men very impertinently urge against what I have been speaking, and that is, *Asa* his going to the Physitians, which the Scripture seems to disallow. To this I answer, that King *Asa* is not therefore reprehended, because he asked advice of the Physitians, but because he trusted only in them, and sought not the Lord: as it is very plain from *2Chron. 16. 12.* And sure no reasona-



ble men will have any doubt but this was a very culpable neglect in *Asa*.

*Fourthly*, Nothing is more evident than that there are several things which have a Physical efficacy in the shortning of Mens lives; as all kinds of excess, namely immoderate eating and drinking; all inordinate passions of mind &c. as also the bad and unwholesome constitution of a Kingdom. And on the other side, there are many things which effectually conduce to the lengthning of our days; namely all kind of moderation and temperance; the wholsomness of the region wherein we live, and our good managery. What kind of persons are those who for ordinary live longest? are they not those who carefully moderate their sensual appetites, and who govern their passions, and who live in the wholesomest places? We commonly say that Men who live in a Populous

polis City are shorter lived than those who live in the Country. I have already shewed how some vices in their proper tendency shorten Mens Lives, and that in some Nations and Kingdoms men live much longer than in others: all which methinks plainly tells us the Period of every Mans Life is not Fatal but Mutable, according as men are careful or negligent of themselves.

I shall only add another considerable argument, and so draw this discourse to a conclusion. And that is, don't we evidently perceive that many men had lived longer if they had not wretchedly and unreasonably exposed themselves to danger; and is it not evident that many Millions who have died in battle would have had their days prolonged if they had never descended into battle? That God hath from the outgoings of Eternity by an absolute and inconditionate degree determined



Of the Period  
Terminated both the time and manner of every mans death, this is more than we can learn from Revelation; and methinks it is very inconsistent and irreconcilable with those many plain texts that shew it is lawful in time of eminent danger to flee for our safety, in time of Famine, and when any egregious contagion, such as the Pestilence, spreadeth in any place. How many Hundreds prolonged their lives by their flight from battel? If *David* and his Men had remained in *Keilah* it is certain they should have been delivered up into the hands of *Saul*; and what the Event should have been we may easily conjecture, if God by a special providence had not interposed for their safety. But besides the many instances we might produce, we have a positive precept to flee from any eminent danger, *Mat. 10. 23. When they persecute you in this City, flee into another.* Which plainly shews that  
this

this is a lawful means of prolonging our lives in such cases. It is a notable instance we have, *Jer. 27.18. Thus saith the Lord, behold I set before you the way of life, and the way of death: he that abideth in this City shall dye by the Sword, and by the Famine, and by the Pestilence: but he that goeth out and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey.* Which place plainly shews, that God had not decreed the Period of their Lives by any inconditionate decree; for the means both of prolonging and of cutting short their Lives, are put in their choice. And this is all that I shall say to the *Third* thing I proposed to speak, concerning the mutability of the Period of every Mans Life for ordinary.

All that now remains is to conclude with some practical reflections upon what hath been said. And *first*, whatever debates there may



may be concerning the Period of every Mans Life, yet there is no doubt but Mans Life hath a Period. *It is appointed for all men once to dye*, and from this warfare there is no discharge. Pray what is become of all those who lived in former ages? have they not gone the way of all living? and shall we think to shun the approach of this last Enemy? may not the multiplied experiences we have of other Mens frailty and mortality, convince us that we are brittle, and must return to the dust? we are of the like constitution that they were of, and we cannot expect to be otherwise dealt with. *What man is he that liveth & shall not see death?* and yet many men live as unconcerned as if they had the perpetuity of their beings ensured to them, and had *concluded an agreement with Death*, and had *secret intelligence with the Grave*. It is truly a business worthy to be regretted that men who are living,

ing, as it were in the House of mourning, daily visited with pains and diseases, and have no promise, at least, for one moments security, yet live unconcerned, and never mind those pleasures. It was indeed a praise worthy and commendable custom amongst the *Jews*, to build their Sepulchers in their Gardens (as we may guess from *Job. 19. 14.*) that so in the midst of their pleasures, they might behold Monuments of their mortality.

Truly if we did frequently meditate upon our latter end, we should live more like Christians than we now do. The end hath a very great influence upon mens endeavors; hence is that general *Maxim, Finis ultimus præscribat regulas totius vite.* And it seems that the Psalmist upon this account prays, *Lord make me know mine end, and the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am.* It is not to be doubted but



but we should order our conversation aright, If we had this consideration in our view. We should have but low and contemptible thoughts of the perishing pleasures which we now so much delight in. Then we should be argued out of our folly in spending our years as a tale that is told.

It is threatened a sad Plague to the oppressor, *that the number of his years are hidden from him,* Job. 15. 20. He is a person that never considers that his appointed time approacheth, and that God will bring him into the Grave, the place appointed for all living : and it is laid down as the cause why *Jerusalem came down wonderfully,* that *she remembered not her last end,* Lam. 1. 9. And truly it may be also reckoned as the cause why Christians live so contrary to the commendable rules of the Gospel they profess. If we did but entertain some what more familiar

familiar thoughts of our appointed time, we could not but rectify those abuses we are guilty of. But alas! all the passages of our time are filled up with cares about things that perish: we can walk to the Grave with our friends, whom we once loved as intirely as our own lives, and reap as little advantage by their death as if we had never been acquainted with them, never remembring, *that we must go to them, but they cannot return to us.*

But *Secondly*, although the Period of every Mans Life is fixed in respect of the Divine foreknowledge, yet to us it is uncertain; we know not when this Enemy may surprise us. Of this we may say what our Lord Christ saith of the day of judgment, *but of that day and hour we know not.* When we least suspect its approach, it may call us to go hence and be no more. How many millions of strange and unexpected accidents attend us?  
*the*



*the Pestilence walketh in darkness, and Destruction wasteth at noon-day,* astonishing dispensations may alarm us by night, and the devouring Arrow fleeth by day. *Psal. 91. 5, 6.* When we go abroad, we cannot promise to our selves a safe return, and at home when we put off our cloths, we cannot tell if we shall ever put them on again: the Grave is always ready for us. What strange kind of unknown diseases doth our age produce, from which we cannot promise to our selves any exemption? We live amongst cruel and mad Men, and do we know but those Beasts of prey may devour us? When we look for peace, destruction may come. This was the Rich Mans Fate, who while he was promising himself rest for many days, *that same night his Soul was required of him.* We are always apt to put the thoughts of this day far from us; when  
we

we enjoy health we never think of any change, and that sickness may seize upon us and put a Period to our lives. We live indeed at a great deal of uncertainty; *man also knoweth not his time, as the Fishes that are taken in an evil Net, and as the Birds that are caught in the snare: so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them, Eccl. 9. 12.* We look upon Death as the unfaithful Servant did upon his Masters coming, we think Death doth *delay its coming*; but if we were not fools we should always realize the quickness of its approach. May be we are young and strong, how many such have been called away in the morning of their age? *Go to now (saith the Apostle James) ye that say to day or to morrow we will go into such a City and continue there a year, & buy and sell and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow, Jam. 4. 13, 14. .* Alas



*Of the Period*  
Our days at best are but labor  
and sorrow, for they are soon cut  
off, and we flee away. When a  
few years are gone, Wee must go  
the way of all flesh: and yet upon  
the happy improvement of this  
depends our everlasting hapiness  
or misery; for *there is no work,  
nor device, nor knowledg, nor wis-  
dom, in the Grave whither we are  
going, Eccl. 9 10.*

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**FINIS.**

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